

# THE BAPTIST Record

JOURNAL OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CONVENTION

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MISSISSIPPI  
BAPTISTS

## Standing firm

### Iranian pastor won't reject Jesus; execution looming

**WASHINGTON** (BP and local reports) — The White House has increased international pressure on Iran to release a Christian pastor sentenced to death, as several reports seemed to confirm his execution order has been issued and may soon be carried out without further notice.

The pastor, Yousef (also spelled Youcef) Nadarkhani, was sentenced to death in 2010 for allegedly converting from Islam to Christian in a case that began in 2009. Islamic law calls for the death of anyone who can be proven to have been a practicing Muslim before converting to another faith.

The complex court system in Iran, infused with Islamic Sharia law, has bounced Nadarkhani's case from judge to judge and court to court without any clear resolution. However, observers believe this latest ruling will move Nadarkhani closer to execution.

The statement from the Obama administration is its strongest yet from the White House in Nadarkhani's case.

"The United States stands in solidarity with Pastor Nadarkhani, his family, and all those who seek to practice their religion without fear of persecution — a fundamental and universal human right," the statement read. "The trial and sentencing process for Pastor Nadarkhani demonstrates the Iranian government's total disregard for religious freedom, and further demonstrates Iran's continuing violation of the universal rights of its citizens."

"The United States calls upon the Iranian authorities to immediately lift the sentence, release Pastor Nadarkhani, and demonstrate a commitment to basic, universal human rights, including freedom of religion."

The statement also urged other nations to join in pressuring Iran, saying, "The United States renews its calls for people of conscience and governments around the world to reach out to Iranian authorities and demand Pastor Nadarkhani's immediate release."

The U.S. State Department released a similar statement.

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) was the first organization to warn of Nadarkhani's possible death order on Feb. 21, quoting its sources as saying an order "may have been issued." On Feb. 22, a FoxNews.com report went a step further, removing any question and saying the order had been handed down.

On Feb. 23, ACLJ Executive Director Jordan Sekulow told Baptist Press that the secrecy of the Iranian regime prevents anything definite from being known, although ACLJ sources in Iran say the execution order has been issued.

Sekulow said many executions in Iran are not known as definitive "until you get the body." In Iran, "they don't have to notify the family. They don't have to notify anybody," about a pending execution.

"I haven't given up hope," Sekulow said. "There are countries that can speak out — not just our own government and not just Europe. The regime needs to know that we know exactly what they're doing, and they're not going to get away doing it without us telling the world."

The Iranian system is different from those in the West because international pressure can make a difference and cause Iranian officials to change course, Sekulow said.

"We're at that point again," he said.

Sekulow said a positive outcome to the current crisis would be for an Iranian news service to report that Nadarkhani is alive and is not near execution. "I would love to be told that we're all liars. That's fine because if he's still alive — that's our goal."

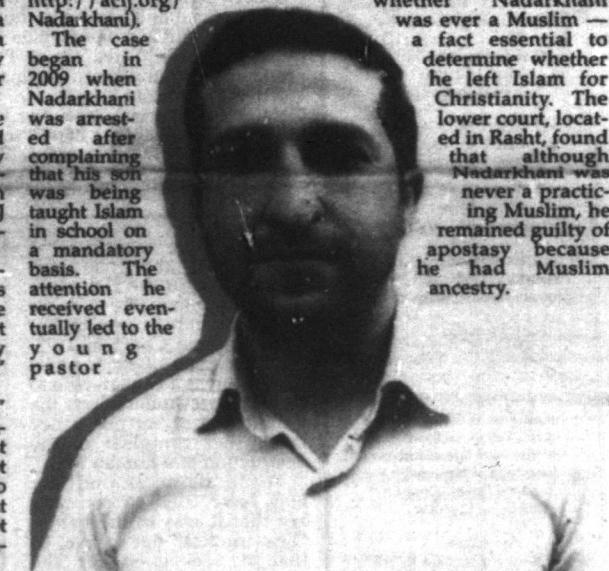
Sekulow added, "It's not over." ACLJ has launched a Twitter for Youcef program to spread the news about the pastor around the world. So far, more than 420,000 Twitter accounts have been reached, touching 162 countries. (Learn more at <http://aclj.org/>)

Nadarkhani was arrested after complaining that his son was being taught Islam in school on a mandatory basis. The attention he received eventually led to the young pastor

being charged with converting from Islam. He eventually was sentenced to death by the court of appeals.

In 2011, the Iranian Supreme Court upheld the death sentence but ordered a lower court to examine whether Nadarkhani

was ever a Muslim — a fact essential to determine whether he left Islam for Christianity. The lower court, located in Rasht, found that although Nadarkhani was never a practicing Muslim, he remained guilty of apostasy because he had Muslim ancestry.



"The United States stands in solidarity with Pastor Nadarkhani [above photo], his family, and all those who seek to practice their religion without fear of persecution — a fundamental and universal human right. ... The United States calls upon the Iranian authorities to immediately lift the sentence, release Pastor Nadarkhani, and demonstrate a commitment to basic, universal human rights, including freedom of religion."

— Statement from The White House



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# A little more inclusiveness can't hurt

The name change task force appointed last year by Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) President Bryant Wright made its report to the SBC Executive Committee on the evening of Feb. 20. After wading through the lofty verbiage and lengthy explanations, the impression is that the report cuts a pronounced pathway down the middle of the road by recommending the continued use of "Southern Baptist Convention," and adding "Great Commission Baptists" as a nickname of sorts.

Since Wright went outside normal channels to personally appoint the rump task force, members of the group had no real authority to recommend anything to Southern Baptists. Because it was not an officially sanctioned task force, members had to be willing to pay their own way to meetings. Jim Draper, retired former president of LifeWay Christian Resources and former two-term SBC president, was asked by Wright to serve as chairman. As can be plainly seen from the list of task force members

on page nine of this issue of The Baptist Record, Wright didn't come close to appointing a body representative of Southern Baptists even if the task force was unofficial and had no authority.

There is double representation from the Dallas-Fort Worth area (Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth, and Susie Hawkins, wife of GuideStone Financial Resources President O.S. Hawkins). Southern Baptist seminaries were also doubly represented (Patterson and R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Ky.).

The Baptist state conventions had two representatives in John Sullivan, executive director of the Florida Baptist Convention, and Fred Hewitt, executive director of the Montana Southern Baptist Convention. The leaders of two Southern Baptist agencies were on the task force: Tom Eliff, president of the International Mission Board in Richmond, Va., and Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board (NAMB) in Alpharetta, Ga. The inclusion of Bob Sena, a retired NAMB director, gave NAMB two representatives on the task force.

Not to torture the point, but Southern Baptist entities had five direct representatives, or 26% of the total makeup of the task force (Patterson, Mohler, Eliff, Ezell, and Roger Spradlin, chairman of the SBC Executive Committee). The Woman's Missionary Union was not included, however.

None of these people did anything wrong by accepting Wright's request to serve on his name change task force. Their sincerity and integrity is not being questioned. It's the matter of balance on Wright's part that should be questioned because, while several Southern Baptist constituencies enjoyed multiple representations, entire swaths of Southern Baptist life were not included.

For example, there was not a single Mississippi Baptist on the task force. Other faithful and SBC-supportive groups were likewise overlooked — Louisiana Baptists, Arkansas Baptists, and Oklahoma Baptists, to name only three. Was there not

one Baptist worthy of appointment in the whole of those three states?

The argument can be made that not everyone can be represented on every task force and committee, but it appears from the expansive list of appointees that size was not a problem. Wright could have toned down the many multiple representations on the task force and included some of the unrepresented groups. He could have expanded the task force. After all, it was unofficial and had no real authority.

He could have appointed an advisory committee to assist the task force, which would have at least given second-tier representation to some of the excluded groups. He could have organized local "town hall" meetings to include Baptists in the states he left off the task force.

He did none of those. When attempts to appoint committees and task forces at any level of Baptist life turn out to be as ham-handed and unrepresentative as the name change task force, people will talk. People will question the legitimacy of the project. People will ignore the outcome, with some justification for doing so.

That's too bad, because being known by the nickname, "Great Commission Baptists," is not a bad idea. As a matter of fact, it will probably sail through messenger approval at the SBC annual meeting this June in New Orleans.

The process could have been handled in a much more credible and inclusive way, though. That much is obvious.

THANKS TO THE STATE-OF-THE-ART "PULPIT-TOP COMPUTER", PASTOR GABRIELA NOW HAS INSTANT RECALL FOR ALL SCRIPTURES ON HIS TEXTS. TRAGICALLY, HE NEGLECTED TO CHECK THE DOWNLOAD CAPACITY OF HIS CONGREGATION.



**JOE MURRAY**

## GUEST OPINION:



### 'October Baby' and forgiveness

By Dwayne Hastings  
Nashville

million end in abortion. At this pace, nearly a third of U.S. women will have had an abortion by the time they turn 45 years of age.

Those who push a so-called pro-choice perspective disavow reality when they say that women can have an abortion and be unchanged by it. In truth, she has been inalterably changed.

Most often, abortive women seek to deal with the emotional trauma and distress on their own. Society tells them to get over it and to get on with their lives.

Yet there is healing and forgiveness with no strings attached in Christ. Jesus knows the pain. He feels their hurt. He wishes for each person to come to Him in faith, no matter his/her background or baggage.

This is a spiritual issue. The scourge of abortion is the sour fruit of a culture that denies that all human life is beautiful and valuable. The reality of abortion is evidence the church has failed to teach Truth and to be "salt and light."

As Christ-followers, we must forgive because we have been forgiven. The soon-to-be released film, *October Baby*, centers on the redemptive power of forgiveness. The film, written by brothers Andrew and Jon Erwin, follows a college freshman who seeks answers to her growing list of questions after she discovers her birth mother attempted to abort her.

*October Baby*, which will be released in selected theatres March 23, is a powerful tool for encouraging church-goers to re-engage in the life issue.

It is our responsibility as Christians to support women in difficult pregnancies, particularly when they lack a support network. It is the church's duty to teach the biblical precept of the sanctity of every human life.

The burden rests on people of faith to care for children who are unwanted, either through foster care, adoption, or support for those who are called to do so.

Additionally, Christians are obligated to reach out in love and in forgiveness to those who are still struggling with a decision they made years earlier to abort their child.

The tragic reality is that the state of the culture in the area of life in the 21st century can be laid at the feet of Bible-believing Americans who are neither speaking out nor stepping out for the innocent and defenseless.

When God's people go silent and hide their light under a basket, children are at risk and people suffer.

Hastings is vice-president of communications for the Southern Baptist Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in Nashville. He may be contacted at [kdhastings@erlc.com](mailto:kdhastings@erlc.com).

# Supporters appealing Prop 8 to full court

SAN FRANCISCO (BP) — Supporters of California Proposition 8 that defines marriage as between a man and a woman are appealing a ruling that went against them to the full Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The decision gives ProtectMarriage.com two opportunities, instead of one, to see the Feb. 7 decision reversed. In that ruling, a three-judge panel for the Ninth Circuit struck down Prop 8, although it said its ruling was "narrow" and applied only to California and not to other states.

If the U.S. Supreme Court had refused to hear the case, it would have been the end of the legal road.

"After careful consideration, we determined that asking for reconsideration by the full Ninth Circuit is in the best interests of defending Prop 8," said Andy Pugno, an attorney representing ProtectMarriage.com. "This gives the entire Ninth Circuit a chance to correct this anomalous decision by just two judges overturning the vote of seven million Californians."

The panel's decision was a 2-1 split. Although the Ninth Circuit often is considered the country's most liberal appeals court, its rules regarding full "en banc" reviews could end up benefiting Prop 8 supporters. If a majority of the court's



ONGOING BATTLE — A couple supportive of California's Proposition 8 protests outside a San Francisco courtroom building, in 2010, after a federal judge overturned the amendment which defines marriage in the state by the traditional standard as between one man and one woman. Last month a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals panel affirmed the injunction against and stay of Prop 8, declaring it to be unconstitutional. Supporters of Prop 8 are now appealing the ruling before the full Court. (BP photo)

25 judges agree to hear the case, it will be assigned to the chief judge and 10 randomly selected judges, the Associated Press reported.

Supporters hope that panel would include the court's more conservative judges. "The majority opinion by the smaller panel conflicts with

every state and federal appellate court decision — including binding decisions of the Supreme Court and the Ninth Circuit itself — that has upheld the traditional marriage laws under the federal Constitution as rationally related to the state's interest in responsible procreation and child-rearing," Pugno said.

In their petition to the court, Prop 8 supporters said the Ninth Circuit panel was wrong to rule that the "sole purpose" of Prop 8 was to declare the "lesser worth" of gays and to "dishonor a disfavored group."

"Do President Obama and a host of other prominent champions of equal rights for gays and lesbians support the traditional definition of marriage solely to disapprove of gays and lesbians as a class and to dishonor same-sex couples as a people?" Prop 8 attorneys asked in their petition. "The reality is simply that [t]here are millions of Americans, as

one of the Plaintiffs' own expert witnesses has acknowledged, 'who believe in equal rights for gays and lesbians ... but who draw the line at marriage.'"

California and other states, the petition said, have a legitimate reason to define marriage as between one man and one woman. "Through the institution of marriage, societies seek to increase the likelihood that children will be born and raised in stable and enduring family units by both the mothers and the fathers who brought them into this world," the petition said.

"...By reserving the name 'marriage' to committed opposite-sex couples, Proposition 8 provides special promotion, encouragement, and support to those relationships most likely to further society's vital interest in responsible procreation and childrearing."

Read the full petition at <http://1.usa.gov/AmojQr>.

## Looking back

10 years ago

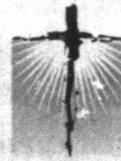
Katie Royals, 17, member of First Church, Jackson, is one of 12 teenagers chosen to participate in TruthQuest California, a new reality-based TV show that follows the adventures of a group as they travel through California reporting on and participating in cutting-edge missionary work.

20 years ago

The Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee, meeting in its regularly scheduled semiannual meeting in Nashville, squarely positions itself against homosexuality and against two North Carolina churches weighing measures sympathetic to homosexuality.

30 years ago

Total gifts through Southern Baptist Convention churches in 1981 exceed the \$500 million mark for the first time.



MISSISSIPPI  
BAPTISTS

## THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

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YOU CAN RESPOND  
RIGHT NOW!

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)

2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)

3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)

4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

## BIBLIOCRYPTER

By Charles Marx, 1932 - 2004  
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TDU UYA LCPX CZ UYA  
GCPX ARXDPAUY ZCP  
AKAP; ERX UYBM BM  
UYA LCPX LYBNY TQ  
UYA WCMSAG BM  
SPAENYAX DRUC QCD.  
ZBPMU SAUAP CRA:  
ULARUQ-ZBKA

Clue: D-U

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Mark One: Ten

Valentine's Day was approaching and I saw a young woman coming out of a store with a decorative sweatshirt that she had just bought. It had a great big heart on it that said, "I Love Me!" Now, I did not know her and I did not stop her to talk about her newly purchased sweatshirt. But she was carrying the sweatshirt in such a way that she wanted everyone to see it, and even more she wanted everyone to see her. It just appeared to me that the sweatshirt was more than just a statement, but it was her stating a fact about her life.

As I walked on, my mind went back to a high school Beauty and Beau Review I had recently attended. One of the questions that each person who was participating was asked was, "Who is the person that you most admire?" The younger students thoughtfully responded "my mom," "my dad," "my grandmother." When we got to the older students, some of the boys, who enjoy putting a little levity into the experience, said things like "the person I most admire is me." While I know they were just trying to be funny, and they were; in reality they were stating a fact — that there is a sense in which maybe all of us have participated in that self-admiration, and to some extent do so throughout our entire lives.

Now, some of you may be already thinking of Jesus' words to us when He instructed us, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). There is a wonderful, marvelous reality that God has made us to love who He has made us to be. We are unique. There is no one on the entire planet — in all of the days gone by, in the present moment, or in all of the days ahead — that will be put together just like you. You and I are special to God. He made us. In His creative genius, He made us in His own image with a uniqueness paralleled by no one else. We are supposed to have a healthy self-image. God wants us to recognize that He cares for us immensely and has invested so much in us. I am not talking about being cocky, or as we used to say, being "stuck-up" or overly endeared to our own image. But in a genuine understanding of biblical truth, we realize that God has made us, for His plans and purposes, something like the world has never seen.

Through the years I have seen so many people grow up in a home with a mom, a dad, or both, who spend a great deal of time putting their children down and damaging their personalities by



## Directions

Jim Futral, executive director-treasurer  
Mississippi Baptist Convention Board

making them believe that they are really nothing special. In fact, they lead those children to believe that they are real disappointments to everybody. It is sad, for those children grow up thinking that they are really not worth much and have little or nothing to contribute to God, country, community, or friends. They think that no one cares for them. They have low and sometimes no self-esteem. Strange as it may seem, many of them appear to be pretty arrogant and overly confident, which is often just a smokescreen for the uncertainties and fears that they have because they feel they are of such little worth. Others simply accept the role of being neglected, rejected, overlooked, and uncared for, and feel that the way people treat them is just proof that they are really not worth much of anything.

It may be that Jesus uniquely sensed these folks and their needs, for He was constantly meeting them and pointing out that they really were of value. Can you imagine what it must have felt like to be one of those people that Jesus saw with so many gifts, such genuine character, and personality that He spoke to them and lifted them up? You remember these people. There was the disillusioned lady who

had been disappointed by so many men. She came out to the well at Sychar only to come in contact with Jesus. Her life was forever made new. There was a blind man on the side of the road who had never been able to see. Most people just walked by and never saw him, or at least never paid any attention to him, but not Jesus. He stopped, talked with him, touched him, and healed him. Suddenly life was forever different. There was a man hanging on a cross that everybody was passing by. They saw nothing of value in him, but Jesus did. He said to the man as he hung on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 29:43). Can you imagine?

It may be that you were not the brightest person in the class, the best athlete, or the finest musician. It scared you to death to speak in public and you were unable to write your thoughts down on a piece of paper in a coherent fashion. You were never chosen for the beauty of the class, nor did anyone recognize the sparkle of your personality. For much of your life you thought you had so little to give. I tell you the truth, that you are a creation of the God of heaven. In spite of warts and uncertainties in life, you are loved by God and designed for special purposes

by Him. Does everyone see that in you? Probably not. But do not ignore the people who do, because one after another God will put people in your path who simply, almost in passing, affirm you. They will point out what you may not be able to see inside of you, or see if you look in a mirror. It is a God thing. It is a God created thing. It is a God shining in you and through you thing.

I would not encourage you to go out and buy a sweatshirt and wear it around saying, "I Love Me!" I would encourage you to put on a sweet spirit of gratitude toward God and His Son, Jesus, which says, "I am thankful that the Lord has made me and given me opportunity to bless someone's life." Ask Him each day, as you charge out into His world, to give you wisdom, insight, and sensitivity to touch someone's life, encourage them, and bless them.

The author can be contacted at [jfutral@mbcb.org](mailto:jfutral@mbcb.org).

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## JUST FOR THE RECORD



1. First Church, Oxford, Scout recognition



3. Hood licensing



4. Richardson ordination



6. The Randles



7. Caruthers ordination

1. Twelve members of Boy Scout Troops 45 and 146, both of Oxford, recently completed the requirements for awards in the God and Country Program. After completing nearly two months of study about their faith, their church and God's will for their lives, the Scouts earned certificates and awards that can be worn on their uniforms. The honors were presented Feb. 5 at First Church, Oxford, as part of an observance of national Scout Sunday. The group includes (front, from left) Carter Diggs, Will Farmer, Baryn Rasberry and Robert Rayburn; (second row) Rustin Rasberry, William Alexander and Drew Mulkey; and (back row) William Rayburn, Scott Parkin, Josh Woods, Thomas Garner and Paul Garner.

2. Unity Church, Georgetown, will host The Riders Spring Break Tour March 14, 7 p.m. Potluck supper at 8. Love offering will be taken. For more information or directions, please call (601) 845-6537.

3. Clarksdale Church, Clarksdale, licensed Greg Hood to the Gospel ministry on Feb. 19. Shown are Stephanie Hood, Hood, and pastor Don Dunavant.

4. Antioch Church, Becker, ordained Bryan Richardson to the ministry Feb. 12. He will be serving First Church, Gaffman. Shown are Randy Parchman, Richardson, Robert Fowkes, and Jim Harrington.

5. First Church, Terry, exceeded its \$12,500 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

goal by receiving \$12,861.30.

6. Freedonia Church, New Albany, ordained James Randle as deacon. He is shown with his wife, Leslie, and daughters Grace, Molly, and Claire.

7. Bethel Church, Oxford, ordained James Caruthers to the ministry Dec. 3, 2011. Shown are Jo Thornburg, pastor Don Thornburg, Caruthers, and Kathy Caruthers.

8. Warren Association is sponsoring the Warren Wildlife Extravaganza Mar. 17, 10 a.m. — 8 p.m. at the Vicksburg Convention Center. Exhibits, hunting and fishing equipment giveaways, seminars on wildlife outdoor issues, children's games and fun. Free.

9. Poplar Springs Church, Newton, will host the singing group The Rowzees Mar. 10, 6 p.m.

## COLLEGE NEWS

1. A display of rare hymnals will be displayed at Mississippi College's Leland Speed Library through early May. They are part of the collection of MC professor Lewis Oswalt. For more information on the collection of rare hymnals, contact MC special collections librarian Heather Weeden at (601) 925-3434 or at weeden@mc.edu.

2. William Carey University will offer a symposium for high school sophomores, juniors and seniors who are interested in health care careers on March 3, from 9:30 a.m. — 12:30 p.m. During the sessions, students

will discover employment trends in health care, as well as receive information about careers in medicine, nursing, mental health, and other allied health fields. Representatives from University Medical Center, JCJC, PRCC, MGCCC, WCU, WCL.COM and other colleges and universities will be present as well as a representative of the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program. Lunch will be served. To register for the symposium, call (800) 962-5991, ext. 103, or (601) 318-6103. For more information about WCU, visit [www.wmcarey.edu](http://www.wmcarey.edu).

## STAFF CHANGES

1. Central Church, Lincoln Association, has called David Ruffin, shown, as minister of children and youth.

2. Bruce Wilkes, student pastor at First Church, Vicksburg, has been called to Brookwood Church, Lawrenceville, Ga.



1. Ruffin

## REVIVALS AND HOMECOMINGS

1. Holly Springs Church, Brookhaven: Homecoming, Mar. 18; Sunday School, 9:30 a.m.; business meeting, 10:05 a.m., followed by special music group, Revelation, and covered-dish lunch.

2. Philadelphia Church, Lafayette Association: Revival, Mar. 4 — 7; PJ Scott, speaker; Andrew Basinger, music; Bobby Irvin, pastor.

*Record*

# Vanderbilt clampdown snares collegiate ministry

NASHVILLE (Special) — Leaders of the Baptist Collegiate Ministry (BCM) at Vanderbilt University in Nashville are determining how a new policy will affect the BCM ministry on campus.

On Jan. 31, the administration of Vanderbilt met with students to explain its enforcement of the university's non-discrimination policy and a new "all-comers" policy.

The all-comers policy means that any student at Vanderbilt is entitled to become a member and to seek a leadership position in any registered student organization on campus.

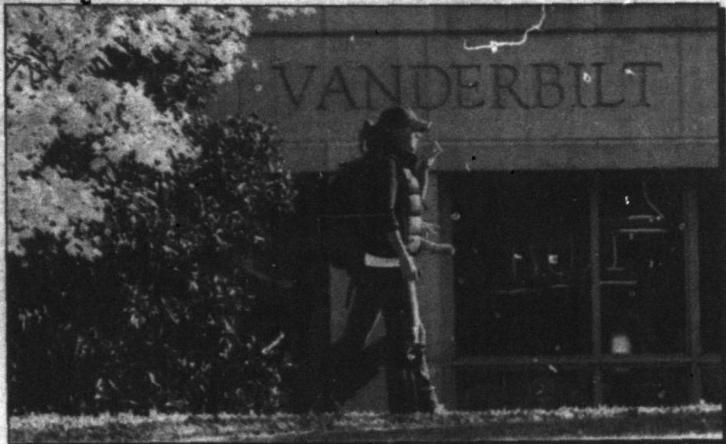
Thom Thornton, BCM director at Vanderbilt, said the BCM has had an "open door" philosophy on campus when it comes to students participating in their ministry. "We want to create an atmosphere where non-Christian students feel welcome," Thornton said.

Students can then develop friendships and engage in conversations which can lead to witnessing opportunities, invitations to Bible studies, and eventually to students accepting Christ, he said.

The dilemma for the BCM and other organizations on campus is what criteria can be used to select leadership. The new policy states that student organizations cannot discriminate in membership or leadership, cannot have a statement of faith that they require leaders to sign, cannot have a faith prerequisite for leadership, and cannot select leaders in a discriminatory manner, Thornton noted.

He said one administrator said that if faith was the only criterion for holding a leadership position, it would be discriminatory.

Thornton noted that while faith is a key element for BCM leaders, it is not the only criterion used. The BCM currently uses a selection process for lead-



UNYIELDING — A sweeping set of new policies designed to regulate recognized groups on the campus of Vanderbilt University in Nashville has Baptist Collegiate Ministry leaders scrambling to respond to the measures. Despite negotiations, the university's administration has not indicated that it is willing to compromise on the policies. (BP photo courtesy of Vanderbilt University)

ership in which Thornton appoints a selection committee that interviews all leadership applicants. After that process has occurred, the leaders are chosen.

Bill Choate, collegiate ministries coordinator for the Tennessee Baptist Convention in Nashville, acknowledged that faith is one of the criteria used for selecting leaders at all BCM ministries in the state. "If faith can't be one of the criteria, we have a major crisis," he said.

"At this point we do not have enough clarification from the university to know what they are asking of us," Thornton said.

While most of the outcry to the policy has come from religious and Christian organizations on campus, the

policy affects all organizations, the two BCM leaders noted.

Choate observed that the new policy is an over-reaction by Vanderbilt administrators to an earlier incident in which a Christian fraternity asked an openly gay member to resign. The young man later filed a discrimination complaint against the university.

As a result, the school "stepped up its discrimination policy and removed a statement in the student handbook that protected religious organizations and their right to elect leaders," he said. "For months we thought the university would back away from this ridiculous position, but now it looks like they may not."

Choate said that "part of our strategy is to be good citizens of the universities in which we minister. Vanderbilt may deny us that opportunity."

He added that the BCM has been a part of a diverse community for 85 years at Vanderbilt, but "it looks like the university wants to decrease diversity on campus."

Thornton noted the BCM is trying to work with the university and be supportive of its non-discrimination policy. At the same time, Thornton said it is important to be able to select BCM leaders who support the vision and purpose of the organization.

"We can't compromise on that," he said.

As it stood before the all-comers rule, the BCM was in compliance, Thornton said.

Four on-campus organizations had been cited for non-compliance: the Christian Legal Society, Beta Upsilon Chi, Graduate Student Fellowship, and Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Campus organizations have until April 16 each year to complete Vanderbilt's documents to become a recognized group on campus.

Thornton said meetings will be taking place among its leadership to decide the next steps to take. Any action taken must receive approval from the local BCM board, he added.

"Our desire is to be a recognized student organization at Vanderbilt," Thornton said, noting the BCM is the second oldest religious organization on the Vanderbilt campus.

"At the same time, we will hold to the integrity of our religious beliefs," he said.

*Editor's note: This article originally appeared on the web site of The Baptist and Reflector, news journal of the Tennessee Baptist Convention.*

## Churches seen as key in overturning same sex marriage law in Md.

ANNAPOLIS, Md. (BP) — Religious leaders in Maryland say citizens will get the final say on a same sex marriage bill that is set to become law, with churches playing a critical role in possibly overturning it.

The Maryland Senate passed a bill Feb. 23 by a vote of 25-22 that would redefine marriage. That vote came less than a week after the House of Delegates approved the same bill, 72-67. Democrats control both chambers, and Democratic Gov. Martin O'Malley, who endorsed the bill in his State of the State address, is expected to sign it.

Maryland is the latest state to act on the issue in what has been a dizzying year on the state level. Washington's governor signed a same sex marriage bill. New Jersey's governor vetoed a similar bill. A coalition in Maine gathered enough valid signatures to place a same sex marriage referendum on the fall ballot after voters in that state overturned an earlier same sex

marriage bill that had been approved by the legislature and signed by the governor.

Like Washington state, Maryland law allows citizens to gather signatures in an attempt to "veto" new laws. Signature drives in both states likely will be successful. Maryland church groups must gather approximately 56,000 valid signatures for it to go on the November ballot.

A coalition has been formed known as Maryland Marriage Alliance ([www.MarylandMarriageAlliance.com](http://www.MarylandMarriageAlliance.com)) to fight the law, which isn't set to take effect until January 2013.

"We will do whatever we can to mobilize for the referendum," Robert Anderson, pastor of Colonial Church in Randallstown, Md., told Baptist Press. "[The other side has] got all the money. But with God, all things are possible."

Catholics, too, figure to be involved heavily. Baltimore Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien released a statement after the Maryland legislative vote saying

the archdiocese will "eagerly and zealously engage its 500,000 members in overturning this radical legislation" and will join with others "throughout Maryland in aggressively protecting the God-given institution of marriage."

Because of its proximity to the nation's capital, the Maryland vote figures to make national headlines.

U.S. House of Representatives Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., released a statement shortly after the Maryland vote, saying it marked "an extraordinary victory for the people of Maryland and a critical step forward in the march for marriage equality nationwide."

Anderson called the issue one that goes beyond "political lines." As an African American, he said, he is aware that blacks tend to vote Democratic but by and large, he said, African American churches have been united against the bill.

Anderson said about 500 members of his predominantly African American church signed

cards opposing the bill that were given to legislators.

"We're talking about something more basic to society and civilization," Anderson said. "Black churches and black-clergy got involved when the homosexual community started to make it an issue of civil rights. That's a sacred cow among African Americans. We know what civil rights are. Our skin color — we didn't have a choice. The color of your skin has nothing to do with sin."

"Homosexuality is sin. To be black, to be Asian, to be Native-American, that is not sin."

Anderson said the state of Maryland has a legitimate interest in defining marriage as between one man and one woman. "From a sociological level, it's best for the children. Every child has a right to say at the end of the day, 'Good night Mommy,' or 'Good night Daddy.'

"Every study tells you that



Anderson

it's better for a child, overall in the long run, to have both a mother and a father."

North Carolina and Minnesota also will vote this year on the issue, although those votes will be on constitutional amendments defining marriage as between a man and a woman.

# Task force: Keep SBC name, with addition

## Group puts forth 'Great Commission Baptists'

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP and local reports) — The task force appointed to study a possible name change of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) is recommending the convention maintain its legal name but adopt an informal, non-legal name for those who want to use it: "Great Commission Baptists."

The report, presented Feb. 20 by task force chairman Jimmy Draper to the SBC Executive Committee meeting in Nashville, ended weeks of speculation by Southern Baptists and fellow evangelicals as to what the task force would do.

The SBC was formed in 1845. A name change was first proposed in 1903 and has been followed by several other attempts through the years, all unsuccessful.

"This is an issue that just won't die," said Draper, a former SBC president and retired president of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, in presenting the task force's recommendation to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee approved the recommendation Feb. 21, sending it to SBC messengers for a vote at the June annual meeting in New Orleans.

With about 70 Executive Committee members present, only about six members voted in opposition.

The name, "Southern," is a barrier to the Gospel in some regions of the country, Draper said. The recommendation would mean that the legal name of the convention would remain, "Southern Baptist Convention," and could be used by any cooperating church which wishes to use it. Other SBC churches could call themselves "Great Commission Baptists," if they wish to do so.

Draper told the Executive Committee the new term would be a descriptor. "We believe that the equity that we have in the name Southern Baptist Convention is valuable. It is a strong name that identifies who we are in the theology, morality and ethics, compassion, ministry, and mission in the world. It is a name that is recognized globally in these areas."

"We also recognize the need that some may have to use a name that is not associated with a national region as indi-

cated by the word, 'Southern.' We want to do everything we can to encourage those who do feel a name change would be beneficial without recommending a legal name change for the convention. We believe we have found a way to do that."

The goal from the beginning, Draper said, "was to consider the removal of any barrier to the effective proclamation of the Gospel and reaching people for Christ."

Website URLs already have been secured in case the convention approves the informal name.

Changing the legal name would have been fraught with problems, Draper said during his presentation. "We believe that the potential benefits of a legal name change do not outweigh the potential risks that would be involved in a legal name change. Changing the name of the convention would require a great cost in dollars and in energy, and would present huge challenges legally that create a multitude of issues. The value of a name change does not justify the risks involved."

"At the same time, we are concerned about the negative perception that the word, 'Southern,' may carry in certain geographic areas of North America but even there, the opinions are mixed on this issue. From leaders in non-Southern states, one-half of those we heard from reported that it would be a benefit to them to change the name, but the other half said it would not be a benefit."

"It is true that the leaders of African American and other ethnic Southern Baptist churches indicated that it would be helpful to them."

Keeping the legal name while using an informal, non-legal name would be a "win-win" situation, Draper said.

Two task force members spoke to the Executive Committee regarding the report: Ken Fentress, pastor of Montrose Church in Rockville, Md., and Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Seminary in Ft. Worth.

"Why am I Southern Baptist?" Fentress asked. "This is a question that I've been confronted with several times over the years, and it's probably true that most African Americans are Southern Baptist despite objections of many in the larger black Christian community."

The convention's ties to slavery upon its founding in 1845 are barrier to some in the African American community, Fentress said, saying the name, "Southern Baptist," is "full of meaning, significance, and history."

"For many African Americans, our reasons for



PRESENTING PROPOSAL — Name change task force chairman Jimmy Draper (at podium) addresses members of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee in Nashville on Feb. 20 regarding the task force's recommendations. The Executive committee voted Feb. 21 to approve the proposal for consideration by messengers at the June annual meeting of the SBC in New Orleans. (BP photo)

being Southern Baptist are theological — not cultural, not political, not geographical," Fentress said. "...I am a Southern Baptist specifically because of the theology for which the Conservative Resurgence stood."

The 2009 SBC Annual Church Profile report showed that 6.5% of SBC congregations were predominantly African American while an additional 12.5% reflected other ethnic identities.

The SBC name, he said, has been "a source of difficulty for church planters ... serving in areas outside the American South." It also "has been a source of difficulty among African Americans precisely because of its identity and the history of the Confederacy."

During Tuesday's discussion about the report in the Executive Committee, Darrell Orman, pastor of First Church in Stuart, Fla., and an Executive Committee member who was staunchly opposed to a name change last fall, said he supported the recommendation. He called it a "brilliant Solomonic compromise."

"We have an opportunity to keep our name and fortify 'Southern Baptist Convention,' and we have an opportunity to extend an empathetic hand to some of our other brothers and sisters in Christ and say, 'I love you and I'm sensitive to your situation,'" Orman said.

"It's not just about me in South Florida or Georgia or Alabama or Mississippi. It's all about you, too."

Borrowing an illustration from Draper, Orman likened the "Great Commission Baptists" descriptor to the "Good Hands" phrase used in advertisements by the Allstate Insurance Company. People know what "Good Hands" references, Orman said, but it's not the name of the insurance company.

Paige Patterson, a task force member, told Executive Committee members he has favored a name change of the convention for a while, saying the convention is no longer regional and that "Southern" is offensive to some. The report, he said, is one that "satisfies my conscience on all levels to a degree I never thought possible. I support it enthusiastically."

Patterson also urged Southern Baptists to discuss the issue with charity in coming months. "If at the end of the process, you do not agree, that is fine, but may we agree that we will debate and decide the issue without recourse to a discussion of motives and intentions of the heart which only God can see and know."

At a news conference, Draper said that in recent history, messengers have not been given a report explaining the rationale behind the argument for a new name. "I don't think Southern Baptists, at large, ever really saw the bigger picture, and when we came to the conventions, the vote was usually an emotional vote."

The task force is praying that when messengers come to the convention in June "the people [will] at least have a background on which to make a decision," he said.

"We're not stipulating that anybody do anything," Draper said of an individual church's usage of a name.

"Already, Southern Baptists can do anything they want to do but it really would be very helpful... to so many that have become disenchanted [that] if they use a name other than Southern Baptist, Southern Baptists said, 'That's OK!'"

The task force believes "Great Commission Baptists" can be trademarked, Draper said.

SBC President Bryant Wright, pastor of Johnson Ferry Church in suburban Atlanta, personally appointed the task force in September, outside normal SBC channels. He said usage of the term is purely voluntary.

"Every entity, every state convention, every local church is just going to have to decide how they can best use the phrase, 'Great Commission Baptists,' as a way of communicating to the world who we are and what our mission is," Wright pointed out.

"It can become a rallying call," Draper added.

Frank Page, president of the Executive Committee, was asked by one Executive Committee member if adoption of the recommendation by messengers in New Orleans would necessitate a change in the SBC logo.

Page said the logo "would not have to change," but that "we would do everything that we could to put that descriptor as part of our publications, as part of our publicity."

# Draper presents panel's final report to executives

*Editor's note: Below is the verbatim final report issued by the name change task force, followed by a listing of members of the committee. The report was presented Feb. 20 to the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) Executive Committee meeting in Nashville, Tenn., by task force chairman Jimmy Draper.*

We thank [SBC President Bryant Wright] for giving us the privilege of serving on this task force concerning the possibility of changing the name of the Southern Baptist Convention. We have recognized that our role is not official. We are making recommendations for the president to consider in this matter. We fully understand that any potential change in the name and identification of the Southern Baptist Convention would not succeed without the support of the Executive Committee and the formal vote of the Convention itself.

We have had the benefit of having the reports of the three previous studies which were made in the last fifty years. I wrote all of our State Executive Directors and Entity Presidents of the Convention to seek their suggestions and input. We received much input from individual Baptists and Baptist organizations in this process. We actually received over 535 names for consideration of any potential name change, and for the sake of posterity, I will provide them as an attachment to the written copy of this report that we will provide to Baptist Press.

Our one desire from the beginning was to consider the removal of any barrier to the effective proclamation of the Gospel and reaching people for Christ. This is an issue that just won't die. In fact, the first attempt to change the name was in 1903. Over the years since then, it has been presented to the Convention in one form or another 13 times. We felt that this is an issue that needed resolution so we could move forward with full energies to present the Gospel around the world.

We believe that the rationale for our recommendations should be widely presented to Southern Baptists for their full understanding of all the ingredients to this matter. Once that is done the issue will be decided by the Convention itself.

We understand that our recommendation does not obligate any person, church or Baptist entity to do anything. There is no connectionism in Southern Baptist life, no hierarchy to dictate to the many facets that make up Southern Baptists. There is no action of the Convention itself which binds any part of Southern Baptist life to comply. Our commitment together is always voluntary.

From our discussions we have drawn some specific conclusions:

The name Southern Baptist Convention is a worldwide brand that identifies who we are. It speaks of our theology, our morality and ethics, our compassion, our ministry and mission in the world. Two things have occurred since the last study was made in 1999 that confirm this fact: the terrorist attack on Sept. 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

These two events thrust the incredible ministry of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief efforts to the front page of public awareness. Recovery efforts in New York following 9/11 were marked by New York residents asking for Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams specifically because of the thorough way they fed people, restored property and conducted themselves with kindness, integrity and

energy. The same was true in New Orleans after Katrina.

The equity we have in the Southern Baptist name is enormous today. We believe that the potential benefits of a name change do not outweigh the potential risks that would be involved in a legal name change. Renaming the Convention would require a great cost in dollars, in energy, as well as re-branding the name to recapture the meaning that our name now represents. The value of the name change does not justify the risks involved.

At the same time, we are concerned about the negative perception that the word "Southern" may carry in certain geographic areas of North America. But even there the opinions are mixed on this issue. From leaders in non-Southern states, one-half of those we heard from reported that it would be a benefit to them to change the name, but the other half said it would not be a benefit. It is true that the leaders of African-American and other ethnic Southern Baptist Churches indicated that it would be helpful to them.

So how do we proceed to gain a win/win situation for the entire Convention? How can we retain the value of the Southern Baptist Convention brand and at the same time give opportunity for those who desire a different name in their area of ministry to have an acceptable way to do so? How could we remove an obstacle to reaching people for Christ and at the same time stay true to who we are? The name "Southern Baptist Convention" tells who we are, but it does not tell what we do.

We believe we have found a way to do that. We recommend to President Wright that the legal name of the Southern Baptist Convention not be changed for the reasons we have stated and for reasons detailed in previous studies. We further recommend that the SBC adopt an informal or "non-legal" name that could be similar to a descriptor or auxiliary name that would be approved for use by those who would prefer a different name. This would allow us to maintain the strong value of the Southern Baptist Convention name and at the same time suggest an alternate name for those for whom it would be beneficial.

I want you to hear from two of our task force members. Dr. Ken Fentress is pastor of the Montrose Baptist Church of Rockville, Md. He is one of the most gifted pastors in our Convention and has some deep convictions about this issue. After he speaks to us, Dr. Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary will share his thoughts on this matter.

[Fentress and Patterson speak, then Draper resumes.]

Let me summarize again our conclusions. We believe that the equity that we have in the name Southern Baptist Convention is a strong name to identify who we are in theology, morality and ethics, compassion, ministry and mission in the world. It is a branded name that is recognized globally in these areas. We also recognize the need that some may have to use a name that is not associated with a national region as indicated by the word "Southern." We want to do everything we can to encourage those who do feel a name change would be beneficial without recommending a legal name change for the Convention. We believe we have found a way to do that.

## Wide variety of proposals made in name change deliberations

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP) — The task force that studied changing the name of the Southern Baptist Convention received 586 distinct name suggestions, with "Global Baptist Convention" leading the way and "Great Commission Baptist Convention" — similar to the informal name that was chosen — ranking in the Top 5, an analysis shows.

The task force received 1,151 name change suggestions with 586 distinct suggestions (that is, not counting duplicates). An analysis of the names by Roger S. (Sing) Oldham, vice president for Convention Relations for the SBC Executive Committee, showed:

- 71% of the 586 distinct name suggestions included "Baptist." When counting duplicates, 86% of the 1,151 suggestions included "Baptist."

- 19 of the top 20 and 49 of the top 50 distinctive suggested names included "Baptist."

- 105 names were suggested by two or more people.

- The most frequent suggestion involved various forms of "Global Baptist," used in such suggested names as Global Baptist Convention, Global Fellowship and Global Baptist Network. — A total of 148 people suggested 36 various combinations that included "Global" and "Baptist."

The analysis showed that the top 10 suggested names were:

1. Global Baptist Convention (85 suggestions)
2. International Baptist Convention (58)
3. United Baptist Convention (30)
4. Evangelical Baptist Convention (25)
5. Great Commission Baptist Convention (23)
6. North American Baptist Convention (23)
7. The Baptist Convention (23)
8. American Baptist Convention (22)
9. World Baptist Convention (19)
10. Worldwide Baptist Convention (19)

• Jimmy Draper, retired president of LifeWay Christian Resources in Nashville, chairman.

• Michael Allen, senior pastor, Uptown Church, Chicago.

• Marshall Blaylock, pastor, First Church, Charleston, S.C.

• David Dockery, president, Union University, Jackson, Tenn.

• Tom Elliff, president, International Mission Board, Richmond, Va.

• Kevin Ezell, president, North American Mission Board, Alpharetta, Ga.

• Ken Fentress, senior pastor, Montrose Church, Rockwell, Md.

• Micah Fries, senior pastor, Frederick Boulevard Church, St. Joseph, Mo.

• Aaron Harvie, lead pastor, Riverside Community Church, Philadelphia, Pa.

• Susie Hawkins, speaker/teacher, Dallas.

• Fred Hewett, executive director, Montana Southern Baptist Convention.

• Cathy Horner, Bible teacher, Providence Church, Raleigh, N.C.

• Benjamin Jo, pastor, Han Korean Church, Las Vegas.

• R. Albert Mohler Jr., president, Southern Seminary, Louisville, Ky.

• Paige Patterson, president, Southwestern Seminary, Fort Worth.

• Bob Sena, retired NAMB director.

• Roger Spradlin, co-pastor, Valley Church, Bakersfield, Ca.

• John Sullivan, executive director-treasurer, Florida Baptist Convention.

• Jay Wolf, senior pastor, First Church, Montgomery, Al.

# Seoul now the Christian heartbeat of Asia

## Young believers actively seeking places in government, influence

SEOUL, South Korea (BP) — Seoul is a study in tensions between old and new. Modern high-rise apartment and office buildings sit alongside ancient palaces and temples. Young Koreans with money to spend pack popular shopping districts. The elderly take their daily exercise amidst young families, cyclists, and joggers along the banks of the Han River and in parks throughout the city.

At night the city skyline is dotted with the glow of red crosses atop Christian churches situated among trendy restaurants, nightclubs, and karaoke bars that attract businessmen and university students until the early hours of the morning.

Seoul is South Korea's bulging center of politics, culture, finance, entertainment, and religion. Nearly half the country's population resides in Seoul, Incheon, and Suwon — Seoul's larger metropolitan area, which many consider the world's second largest city.

Yet Seoul stands apart from other Asian megacities for the prominence of Christianity and its global influence on evangelical causes. Government statistics report that as of 2011, nearly one in three South Koreans follow Christianity. That nudges Buddhism from the lead it has held for centuries.

Seoul is one of the few cities in Asia considered evangelized by many mission organizations. More than 21,000 South Korean missionaries serve in 169 countries, according to 2009 statistics from the Korea World Missions Association.

Meanwhile, Seoul churches are at the forefront in developing Christian programs, materials, and leaders, and exporting them around the world, says Joseph Kim, lead pastor of Wonchon Church and headmaster of Central Christian Academy in Suwon.

"In the 1990s, most of the innovation in Christian ministry flowed from North America to Korea," the 50-year-old son of Korean evangelist Billy Kim says, "but since 2005, Korean churches

are developing songs, programming, and innovations in the Korean language. Korean churches in North America are beginning to copy things that are happening in Seoul."

### Active participation

Tensions between the traditional and modern, however, are evident both within Seoul society and within the church. Young Koreans are looking for active rather than passive participation in government and worship, which Kim describes as a radically different concept from the hierarchical structure so important to traditional Korean culture.

"Young Koreans want to be involved," Kim says. "They want to make a difference."

Kim says this explains the social justice efforts increasingly prevalent in many Korean churches, with many congregations providing facilities for the homeless, elderly, and disabled.

"This is a new movement of this young generation in participation," Kim says, explaining that the distinction between "liberal" congregations focused on social ministries and "conservative" ones focused on preaching and teaching hardly exists in South Korea.

"In Korea, even the conservative evangelical church is still very active in social work," Kim says.

Abigail Shin, a 31-year-old visiting professor at Seoul National University, also sees evidence of the younger generation's commitment to social issues, noting that a popular red-light district shut down a few months ago after decades in the city's center. However, she remains concerned over a number of other issues facing her generation, including the drinking culture, marital unfaithfulness, dads who are never home, and children under pressure to excel.

Such issues stem from a hierarchical culture built on unquestioning respect for authority, one that is often abused in the business world by "bosses who demand younger workers do the dirty work or serve them in certain ways."

While many young people "robotically" give respect to the older generation, some are rebelling against it, Shin says.

For young and old, Shin says, "I believe there needs to be education about mutual respect." Within the church, Shin believes many young people are turned off by the "in-your-face" evangelism of their elders.

"In Korea, it seems there is an all-or-nothing way of doing Christianity," says Shin, who attends Jubilee Church in Gangnam, a suburb of Seoul.

Part of this stems from societal demands placed on young businessmen, Shin explains, noting that many men are rarely at home and are required as part of their job to visit bars and strip clubs after hours with co-workers and clients.

As Christians, these young men must make "radical decisions such as giving up their job or joining a seminary," Shin says. "It is difficult to live in the world and not be part of it with all the pressures and expectations that come from society."

Korean families are struggling, agrees 34-year-old Isaac Surh, fellowship and youth pastor at Onnuri English Ministry in Seoul. "Parents, especially fathers, are distant from their children, harsh and overly strict, causing children to overreact and rebel."

Surh believes the answer lies in family ministries and church-sponsored pre-marital and marital counseling to help minimize the potential for family dysfunction. Surh applauds initiatives such as the Fathers' School, an Onnuri ministry that teaches Korean men to be good husbands and fathers.

Kim likewise believes that Christian education is the next phase of Korea's church growth and the key to nurturing an evangelical vision among the young.



TAKING A RIDE — A group of Koreans await their stop in a subway car in Seoul. Although Seoul stands apart from other Asian megacities for its embrace of Christianity, tensions between old and young exist both in Korean society and in the church as the younger generation seeks greater involvement in many spheres of life. (BP photo)

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## BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

### I Long For You

Psalm 42:1-11; 43:1-5

By Betty Davis

Memories are special feelings we've stored for a lifetime in our minds and hearts. Any time we want to, we can "call them up" and enjoy them a while. When finished, we lovingly store them in our safe place until we want to recall them again.

I often think of the church across the street from my home when I was a preschooler in Arcadia, Florida. I loved going there. I remember good times with my teacher and friends. One Sunday, all who were present gathered outside and someone took our picture. I still have a copy of that picture with me smiling. Like the psalmist, I long to go back there one day and recall my first stories and thoughts about Jesus. In every church I've attended and been a member of, I have similar fond memories. At age eight, I accept-



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ed Jesus Christ into my life. Now, I know the value of feeling the presence of God in each place of worship. Each week I look forward to every worship service in our church. In our missions and sewing class, my friend, Lori, described God's presence like driving in fog.

God's presence, like fog, is all around us. He's always there, but fog is a clear picture of the closeness of God's presence with us.

#### Thirsting for God Psalm 42:1-5

The psalmist expressed his feelings in a double poem: Psalm forty-two and forty-three. He was far from his place of usual worship. He voiced his intense longing to be in the presence of God. He compares his desire to the way a deer breathes heavily

after running in search of clear, clean water. He thirsted for God. (v.2, NIV) In agony, his tears constantly sufficed the need for food. (v.3, NIV) When asked, "Where is your God?", he longed the more to travel nearly 200 miles and be in his place of worship where he had often felt God's close presence.

Verse five is a refrain where he spoke directly to himself and sounded hopeful. He promised himself he would praise his Savior, God. "Christian worship is the most momentous, the most urgent, the most glorious action that can take place in human life." (Karl Barth)

#### Despairing for God Psalm 42:6-11

The author of these poems was a man of great faith. At this time, he was in the "land of Jordan" that originates above the Sea of Galilee and meanders alongside the Jordan River to the Dead Sea. That doesn't seem far for us today, but trav-

el on foot was hot, dry and tiresome. Although the poet admired Mount Hermon on the Northern border of Israel, he still longed for the familiar Temple where people entered Jerusalem to buy wares, visit the Temple Square, and sing praises. Excitement and laughter seemed far away from nagging loneliness and the threats of his enemies. "Deep calls to deep" (v.7, NIV) may describe the waterfalls and deep gorges from the heights of Mount Hermon, causing the poet to experience waves of depression. Verse eight sees hope raise its head and the psalmist acknowledges God's love. Singing praises at night comforts and recalls his thoughts of God. Then, doubts seep in as he questions God, his Rock of firm support: "Why have you forgotten me? Why do I mourn about the taunting comments of my enemies?" (v. 10, NIV) He sounds like us today. When we hurt, trust in God fades quickly.

The poet's longing wins as he scolds his soul: "Don't be sad. Put your hope in God!"

(v.11, NIV) These verses remind us to look at our lives. Do we have a longing to be closer to God?

#### Confidence in God Psalm 43:1-5

In these five verses, the psalmist asks God for "vindication" (showing him to be right) and to "rescue" him from wicked people. Then, like most of us, he asked, "Why me, God?" He continued pleading for God to care for him and lead him to Jerusalem where he could feel God's presence again.

In the last refrain (v. 5, NIV) The poet promises to worship God, and use a lyre (a stringed instrument similar to a harp used by the ancient Greeks) to praise God! Faith, assurance and hope reign over his depression. "...I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out—plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for." (Jeremiah 29:11, The Message)

*Davis is a member of Fellowship Church, Meridian.*

## EXPLORE THE BIBLE A Special Baby: Rejoice

Luke 1:1-80

By Kelly Mitchell

One of my favorite tactics for firing up kids at church is to ask them advice about my hair. Look at my picture. Read that first sentence again.

The kids are quick to burst out in laughter and state the obvious, "you don't have any hair!" The first time I do that to a kid, I usually look up to a parent's face filled with horror over what their child just said to me. I reassure them that it is not a secret. I know that I don't have any hair. Admittedly, I'm not as comfortable with it as I may seem but true foolishness is to ignore or deny what everyone else can plainly see. What about you? Are you in prolonged state of denial because you are afraid to ask God questions?

In this week's lesson, Mary is quick to state the obvious by asking the obvious question. Is your class a safe place for that or is there an unofficial set of rules about truths that are okay to discuss and truths that best be avoided? How is a visitor supposed to know these "rules"? Where is someone to go that gets tired of ignoring the truth and is ready to confront it? As Mary's example demonstrates, avoiding the obvious and not asking questions, especially the uncomfortable ones, interrupts the spiritual growth cycle and will rob us of any chance at enjoying our Faith and Worship.

First, there has to be a realization of a heavenly truth. (vs. 26-33) God's Word has a power to reach us in ways that



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no earthly philosophy or wisdom can. Thankfully, we don't have to wait around for the Archangel Gabriel to come and proclaim God's instruction to us like he did for Mary. We have the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to point us to God. Without that Spirit, once Gabriel left, Mary's only method of persuasion was her unwavering joy and confidence. Plainly that was not working for everyone. God also sent the angel to Joseph to assure him that it was okay to believe her story. God's success required that Mary have full confidence in her task and that she have the full support of Joseph.

Second, overcome doubt, don't be afraid to ask questions. Mary was understandably perplexed by the message of God and asked the obvious questions (vs. 34-35). God provided immediate answers to her questions plus

He pointed to other verifiable facts that Mary knew to be true. God's interest is served only if she is successful. God is just as interested in your success. It is counter-productive to ask us to move ahead without clear direction or certainty of purpose. God never asked us to trust in something we had no proof of or that we could not verify.

Third, her questions resolved, Mary makes a deliberate decision to play the part God designed for her (vs. 36-38). This is, perhaps, the most common disconnect of them all. We have not yet become the "Lord's slave" (v. 36, HCSB) The Greek used here for slave is "doule" the feminine of "doulos". You can never over-emphasize the harshness and severity of this word.

Lifeway's free resource, [www.mystudybible.com](http://www.mystudybible.com) offers an alternate translation of "handmaid." A handmaid was a slave but one that worked within the home in close contact with the Master. God does not call us to be field hands

that He lords over from the end of the row but to serve with access to Him, in His home, where the burden is light.

Finally, Mary's Model leads us to the payoff, a spontaneous outburst of joy and worship (vs. 42-48). This is the logical result of hearing the truth, embracing the truth, and committing wholly to the truth. Any believer that is living a life that is other than joyful has a disconnect somewhere in this model. Any class that is a burden rather than a source of joy to its membership can use these passages to discover their disconnect from God.

Unless your church has organized discipling programs, Sunday School is most likely the only place where it is reasonable to ask questions and express doubt. Is your class a safe place for this? If no, then, where can a struggling person go in your church to find relief?

*Mitchell is pastor of Main Street Church, Goodman.*

## Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below, and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail form. Due to increasing virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if

submitted as a JPEG file via either e-mail, CD or DVD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lit. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items are generally not publishable. Photographs can not be returned. Please do not attach photos with tape or staples.

All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. Photographs must depict people. No landscape-, building-, or object-only photographs will be printed. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date.

Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis.

Submit news and photographs to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: [baptistrecord@mbcb.org](mailto:baptistrecord@mbcb.org).

# THE BAPTIST Record

# ERLC releases contraceptive mandate fact sheet

WASHINGTON (BP) — The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) ethics entity has issued both a fact sheet about the Obama administration's contraceptive-abortion mandate and a call for support of a bill to restore conscience protections missing from the controversial requirement.

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) posted the fact sheet on its website Feb. 24 and, on the same day, distributed an email alert urging Southern Baptists and others to contact their senators in support of legislation expected to be voted on soon.

The efforts are the latest by the ERLC in combating a final rule announced Jan. 20 by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that requires all health plans to cover contraceptives and sterilizations as preventive services without cost to employees. The contraceptives, as designated by the federal government, include some drugs that can cause abortions by blocking implantation of tiny embryos.

The ERLC — as well as other Southern Baptist entities, evangelical leaders, and the Roman Catholic Church — has especially decried the Obama administration's failure to provide adequate protection for the religious freedom and conscience rights of religious institutions and other employers. The religious exemption in the rule is insufficient to protect religious hospitals, schools and social service ministries, as well as some churches, critics have pointed out.

ERLC President Richard Land said in the email alert, "As we continue to emphasize, this issue is not about contraceptives. Instead, it is about conscience and religious freedom. And we must not allow this assault on our First Amendment freedoms to stand."

The ERLC called for citizens to ask their senators to support the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, S. 1467. The bill, sponsored by U.S. Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri — a Republican and Southern Baptist — is designed to provide conscience protections in the mandate.

Here is the full text of the ERLC fact sheet which is titled, The threat to religious freedom: The Obama administration's contraceptives mandate. Abbreviations and edits have been used in some cases due to space limitations.

**The issue: HHS mandate violates religious freedom.** Under a regulation issued in January by HHS, nearly all insurance plans will be forced to provide their employees with free access to all FDA-approved contraceptives. This mandate includes coverage of abortion-inducing drugs like ella and Plan B (the "morning after" pill), abortion-causing IUDs, and sterilization. This mandate will force millions of Southern Baptists and other people of faith to violate their God-given and constitutionally-protected freedom of religion and conscience.

**How HHS mandate tramples religious freedom.** Not only does the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act mark the first time the U.S. government has forced citizens to purchase a product (health insurance), the HHS contraceptives mandate marks the first time the government will force people of faith to purchase products that violate their consciences.

**A matter of conscience and religious freedom.** While some people argue that this is a contraceptives issue, it is not. Most Southern Baptists accept the use of non-

abortive contraceptives within marriage. The HHS mandate goes way beyond that. It requires that all insurance plans make available abortion-causing products. This means that employers, including religious organizations, will have to make insurance plans available to their employees that violate their religious beliefs. It also means that either the employers or the employees will be required to pay for these products through their premium payments. The Obama administration has declared that religious conviction about abortion is not an acceptable reason for exemption from this requirement. While the offense is about abortion, the dominant issue is the government's determination to violate the constitutionally-protected right to freedom of conscience. No one should be forced by the government to buy or subsidize products that result in the killing of innocent human beings in violation of their consciences. What is at stake is whether our nation will protect our God-given and constitutionally-protected freedom of religion and conscience fought for by our Baptist forbears.

**Limited exemptions.** The Obama administration's contraceptive mandate represents an ongoing attempt to shrink the definition of religious exemption. Their very narrow religious exemption means that most religious groups will be required to provide access to contraceptives, including ones that cause abortions. Under the administration's reasoning, the religious exemption does not include organizations such as local Christian schools and soup kitchens or larger entities such as Christian universities. We have real concerns that evangelical churches can even meet the administration's four-part test — especially the third prong that requires exempted groups to primarily serve persons who share the same religious tenets, since Evangelicals are focused on reaching outside the church ranks. Those religious institutions not covered by the narrow exemption will be forced to choose one of three untenable options:

Obey the law at the expense of their conscience; cease providing coverage, which would force the employees of these religious institutions to obtain coverage with offensive provisions and could subject the religious institution employer to fines if it is

considered a large employer under applicable rules; provide coverage but without complying with the HHS mandate that assaults the religious institution's conscience, which could result in fines to participants if their coverage through the religious institution employer is non-compliant.

**Limited accommodations.** According to the mandate, the only accommodation afforded religious institutions is a one-year extension to comply. Practically, this means religious employers morally opposed to the mandate have an additional year before they must begin violating their consciences.

**No compromise in force.** On February 10, President Obama announced a so-called "compromise" to supposedly exempt religiously-affiliated employers morally opposed to the mandate by allowing them to shift the burden of covering contraceptives and abortifacients (abortion-causing drugs) to their insurance companies. This is merely an accounting gimmick. Employers will still have to make abortion-causing products available in the plans they offer their employees, and the insurance companies will be recovering the cost of these products indirectly through the premiums they charge. What's more, no such "compromise," even if it did resolve any religious liberty concerns, actually exists in print. The president merely suggested the compromise. The original HHS regulation as printed remains unchanged and even if the president's "compromise" is adopted by HHS, the violation of constitutionally-protected religious conscience remains.

**Directly impacts self-insured religious institutions.** Neither the current HHS rule nor the so-called "compromise" provides an exemption for religious employers that self-insure, which means they serve as the source of benefit payments instead of contracting with a third party. That includes GuideStone Financial Resources, the Southern

Baptist Convention's medical plan provider covering tens of thousands of pastors, church workers, professors, secretaries, social workers, missionaries, other agency workers, and their families. The HHS mandate reflects a sobering dis-

regard for the unique and historic structure and role of self-insured medical programs like GuideStone and other large and established church health plans, as well as a shocking encroachment on religious freedom.

**Directly impacts people of faith.** If the HHS mandate is not overturned or changed, many employers whose consciences are violated will have to stop providing insurance for their employees. Further, when these employees seek to purchase their own insurance plans, they will find that the Obama administration's mandate requires every insurance plan to pay for these abortion-causing products and services. This will mean that all of us whose consciences are violated by this morally reprehensible mandate will be forced to choose between paying for these products and services, whether we use them or not, or not having insurance for ourselves and our families and paying a government fine for not having insurance.

**Upsets church/state balance.** In recent decades, most conflicts over the church-state relationship have had to do with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, with debates about the appropriate role of faith in public life. The HHS mandate is the culmination of a shift in church-state relations that has been emerging over the last decade or so, in which the conflict has gone from potential violations of the Establishment Clause to actual violations of the Free Exercise Clause. The HHS mandate is a direct assault on how people of faith can conduct their own lives according to the dictates of their consciences. The mandate puts the federal government in the position of imposing its will on the conscience by executive edict, casting aside individual conscience and religious freedom.

**Sets dangerous precedent.** If the federal government can force religious employers and people of faith to purchase products that offend their faith and conscience, what can't it force them to do?

**Solution: Restore religious freedom with respect for the Rights of Conscience Act.** Jesus instructed us to "render to Caesar what is Caesar's." How now shall we respond when Caesar demands what is God's?

Under an agreement reached by U.S. Senate leaders, the Senate is expected to vote the week of February 27 on the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act (S. 1467), which essentially would stop the contraceptives mandate from taking effect. This would safeguard employers and individuals from being forced to violate their religious convictions on contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs under health care. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO), will be voted on as an amendment to a transportation bill.

With our God-given and constitutionally-protected freedoms of religion and conscience at stake, the church cannot afford to be silent.

If you agree, please contact your senators immediately and urge them to support the Blunt Amendment — the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act — to the transportation bill under Senate consideration. You can reach them through the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 or send them an email through the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's website, erlc.com.

